

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 21/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL,
LINCOLNSHIRE

J Davies
T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Gainsborough Old Hall includes a wall painting record, general audit information, documentation of original materials and execution of the painting, and deterioration and damage including previously used materials and treatment, as well as proposals for treatment and monitoring strategies.

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Gainsborough Old Hall Lincolnshire

The following report has been generated by the Wall Painting Section database. This archival system provides a computerised record of all wall paintings in English Heritage Historic Properties and is intended to comprehensively document the collection. Each report has been subdivided into four sections to present the data in a clear format. These include:

1 Wall Painting Record:

Includes a description of the site and paintings, as well as archival information, such as bibliographic references and photographic records.

2 General Audit Information:

Describes any monitoring undertaken and a synopsis of future conservation requirements.

3 Technique:

Documents the nature and condition of the original materials and execution of the painting which is described according to its stratigraphy and any related analysis.

4 Deterioration and damage, added materials, treatment:

Deterioration and damage lists the types of alterations which may have occurred, that is either deterioration (natural alterations such as cracking or delamination) or mechanical damage (such as graffiti).

Added Materials documents all non-original materials present on or within a painting. These may include naturally occurring substances (accretions, such as dirt and dust) or deliberately added materials (coatings, coverings and repairs).

Treatment documents previous interventions and proposed treatment and monitoring strategies.

Throughout each section, an area of painting is assigned a number between 1 and 4 which is intended as a general indication of present condition. These are: 1 good, 2 fair, 3 poor, 4 unacceptable.

This report is based on information gathered prior to March 1996 and does not include any changes in condition, further research or treatment undertaken after this date. Amended editions will be produced as necessary.

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL
Region Midlands **County** Lincolnshire
Location of painting Lower great chamber
Orientation WEST WALL
Century 16th **Date** **Height (cm)** 500 **Width (cm)** 800
Subjects included
Foliate scrollwork
Inscription(s)
Various decorative motifs

Description

Gainsborough Old Hall is a large late-medieval (c1480) manor house of three ranges - north, west and east - with late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century additions and alterations. The east range originally comprised two floors and housed the main ceremonial rooms. The Inner or Lower Great Chamber contains remains of a fine sixteenth-century(?) decorative wall painting. The majority of this decoration is found on the stud and plaster west wall. Faint remains can however also be seen on other walls of the chamber. The style of the wall painting is quite sophisticated, and is decorated with foliate ornamentation, swags, bells, birds, inscriptions, and draw-string bags/flagons.

Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files; wall painting detail, Nov. 1990, B908202.
Photograph search, DOE files, EH photo library (JD24/03/95)
Gainsborough Old Hall; no relevant DOE photographs found.

Bibliography

- Anderson, C. The Lincoln Pocket Guide, 1st Edn., London, 1880. (Brief ref. to wp).
- Emery, A. 'Ralph. Lord Cromwell's Manor at Wingfield... etc.', Archaeological Journal, 142, 1985.
- Lindley, P. (ed.) Gainsborough Old Hall, Occasional Papers in History and Archaeology 8, The Society of Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, Lincoln, 1991. (Thorough)
- Park, D. notes, 1980.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL	County	Lincolnshire
Region	Midlands		
Location	Lower great chamber		
Orientation	WEST WALL		
Century 16 th	Date	Height (cm) 500	Width (cm) 800
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	18/11/94

Overall condition score **3**

Recommendations

Poorly executed edge repairs have damaged the original paint and are not only unsympathetic to the original fabric but appear to have been carried out using unsuitable materials. In addition, many areas of the original decoration have been lost or severely damaged and the painting is at continued risk of further inadvertent mechanical damage caused by visitors. During this inspection several children visiting the room failed to notice the painting and leant on the wall or swung coats across its surface. This type of action is obviously highly damaging and unacceptable. Also tables have been positioned too close to the decoration and should be relocated or removed.

The installation of a barrier should therefore be considered to prevent further damage. Also, improved interpretation and information about the decoration could highlight its presence and importance.

Conservation treatment is recommended. The appearance of the painting could be considerably improved by a programme of cleaning, uncovering, consolidation and general repairs. This should be based on a preliminary in-depth condition survey.

[Time scale: 3 people, 1 month, within the next 5 years].

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL		
Region	Midlands	County	Lincolnshire
Location	Lower great chamber		
Orientation	WEST WALL		
Century 16th	Date	Height (cm)500	Width (cm) 800
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	18/11/94

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	2
Thickness	30 cm		

Comments

The support is comprised of timber studs and plaster panels. The plaster panels are discussed under render layer 1. The entire base of the wall below the timber cill has been replaced with red bricks bedded in cement mortar. At the rear of the wall two stainless steel vertical joists have been inserted to bear the weight of the ceilings and rooms above. An early repair is visible which was apparently carried out prior to decoration and therefore pre-dates the wall painting.

Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
Thickness			

Comments

The support is comprised of timber studs and plaster panels. The plaster contains red (brick?) and sand aggregates. The nature of the binder is uncertain but may be lime. An early repair is present to the sixth plaster panel from the south side at eye level. The repair is c. 25cm and has a rough surface with trowel marks visible in raking light. The repair was carried out prior to painting and therefore pre-dates the wall painting and suggests an earlier date for the wall structure. It is assumed that the plaster panels are supported on some form of lath type construction, however no clear visual evidence for this was noted on site.

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
Thickness			

Comments

The ground layer is generally black, but appears red at upper frieze height. The layer is degraded and very thin, and is therefore difficult to decipher.

Identified pigments	Colours
---	red
---	black

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

The main painted scheme is very damaged in many areas. It appears to have been heavily abraded, dissolved and redeposited by liquids and to have been softened and absorbed by an application of limewash over the central area of painting. In several places the design survives only as a 'ghost' with the painted image apparently in reverse. To the southern side there are a few coarse edge repairs to the plaster panels. Where the plasterer has attempted to brush excess repair plaster from the surface - presumably with a wet brush - the paint has been dissolved and smudged, indicating that the paint may be water soluble. Visible colours include black, red, green, white, yellow and blue. The blue has a greyish hue and may be an optical blue mix of black and white.

Identified pigments	Colours
---	black
---	red
---	green
---	white
---	yellow
---	blue

4 Audit Information: deterioration and damage, added materials, treatment

Property name	GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL		
Region	Midlands	County	Lincolnshire
Location	Lower great chamber		
Orientation	WEST WALL		
Century 16th	Date	Height (cm)500	Width (cm) 800

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterloration phenomena

Type general erosion

Location Paint layer; entire.

Comments Extensive damage to the paint surface and loss of the paint has occurred.

Type losses (paint layer)

Location Paint layer; numerous areas of loss.

Comments Many areas of paint have been lost or severely damaged.

Type loss of cohesion (paint layer)

Location Paint layer; general.

Comments The remaining paint layer is friable and powdering in many areas.

Type infestation

Location Timber studs of support.

Comments There is evidence of (old) woodworm infestation in several parts of the timber studs of the support layer. It is assumed that the infestation has been treated during previous building conservation. No signs of current woodworm activity were noted during audit inspection.

Type flaking

Location North end, plaster panel, eye level.

Comments A limited amount of minor lifting and flaking of the paint (and ground?) layer(s) was noted during inspection.

Type preferential erosion

Location Entire, especially centre and north end

Comments Preferential erosion. The paint layer has been lost except for where there was impasto decoration - where it survives it now appears black- giving the paint layer an odd 'photographic negative' look. The paint layer appears water soluble and may have been softened/dissolved by the application of limewash to several areas, which may contribute to the unusual appearance.

Mechanical damage

Type nail holes

Location Throughout.

Comments Many small circular holes - probably nail holes - were noted.

Type insertions

Location South side, single door, now removed.

Comments It appears that a door was inserted through the stud and plaster to the south side of the west wall. The door (?) has been removed and the plaster and timbers replaced.

Type substantial losses

Location North side, two large areas.

Comments Losses of timber studs and plaster panels has occurred. The losses have been replaced with modern timber and plaster.

Type insertions

Location Low level, below timber wall cill.

Comments A brick plinth, bedded with cement, has been inserted below the timber cill of the original wall. This may replace an earlier structure and therefore be classified as a type of mechanical damage or may simply be an insertion, supporting, but not replacing the original fabric.

Type nail holes

Location Sixth timber from south side, eye level.

Comments A single nail, with string attached is present in the sixth timber from the south edge of the painting.

Type minor losses

Location Eleventh timber from south side.

Comments A small burn mark, c. 8cm is present at eye level in the eleventh timber from the southern edge of the painting.

Type abrasion

Location Timber studs, low level, especially studs 7, 9 and 10 from south side.

Comments Woodworm channels have been exposed in several of the lower areas of the timber studs. These areas also have a slightly polished appearance. Both these phenomena may indicate that the timbers have been cut back at low level.

Type scratches

Location General.

Comments Numerous scratches and gouges have occurred.

Type insertions

Location Reverse of timber stud and plaster wall.

Comments Two vertical metal joists have been inserted behind the painted wall, presumably to support the ceiling and floors above. The upper ends of the joists appear to have been fixed into the ceiling timbers. Only very limited - and acceptable - damage has been caused to the reverse (unpainted) side of the wall.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type dirt

Location Surface

Comments Obscures painted detail.

Type dust

Location Surface.

Comments Obscures painted detail.

Coatings/Coverings

Type limewash

Location Between timbers 7 - 12 from south end and final 4 timbers at north end.

Comments Very roughly applied, brush marks, drips and 'wiping' marks are all visible. The incomplete layer is of variable thickness and applied only in patches. Impasto of the paint layer shows through the limewash and is possibly partially dissolved in the coating.

Type wax

Location Timbers mostly - possibly plaster- at northern end.

Comments Could possibly be part of a nineteenth century timber treatment. The plaster panels to the northern end have a strange yellowish appearance.

Type panelling

Location Entire, now removed.

Comments Panelling is thought to have been erected over the wall as Anderson (1880:73) records 'some of the walls, when the panelling was removed about twenty years ago, were covered with frescoes in black and white, of which a scrap remains in a small room next the hall, representing a falcon with bells, but the lower part has been tampered with by the restorer.'
D. Park (1980) states 'further wallpaintings discovered'.

Repairs

Type cement

Location Base of wall, below timber cill of wall.

Comments A brick plinth, bedded in cement, has been inserted below the timber wall cill, possible below the original level of the wall. It is not possible to establish whether an earlier structure has been replaced.

Type modern plaster

Location Edge repairs, first six timbers from south side.

Comments Poorly executed edge repairs have been inserted to support the plaster panels within the timber studs at the southern end of the wall. The repairs have smeared edges and it appears that in an attempt to remove overlying plaster from original paint - apparently with a wet brush - the paint layer itself has been damaged and smeared. (During a private visit to the site by one of the auditors in 1989 no edge repairs were noted, therefore the repairs may post-date this visit.)

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments Edge repairs have been poorly carried out to a few plaster studs, damaging original paint in the process.

Type UNCOVERING **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments Rather unsuccessful uncovering tests have been carried out to the centre of the wall.

Type VARIOUS **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments Several building works and repairs have been carried out, including insertion of metal joists to the reverse of the wall, construction of a brick plinth and insertion of replacement timbers and plaster to areas of loss.

Past Treatment

Type UNSPECIFIED **Date** 01/01/60

Person Unknown

Comments Records indicate that some type of restoration work was carried out during the 19th century. Anderson (1880:72) states 'Some of the walls, when the panelling was removed about twenty years ago, were covered with frescoes in black and white ... the lower part has been tampered with by the restorer.'

Proposed Treatment

Type CLEANING **Date** 18/11/94

Person TM/JD

Comments Cleaning may improve the appearance of the painting.

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 18/11/94

Person TM/JD

Comments Friable and flaking areas require some consolidation. Pre-consolidation - prior to cleaning - may also be required in some areas.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 18/11/94

Person TM/JD

Comments Minor repairs.

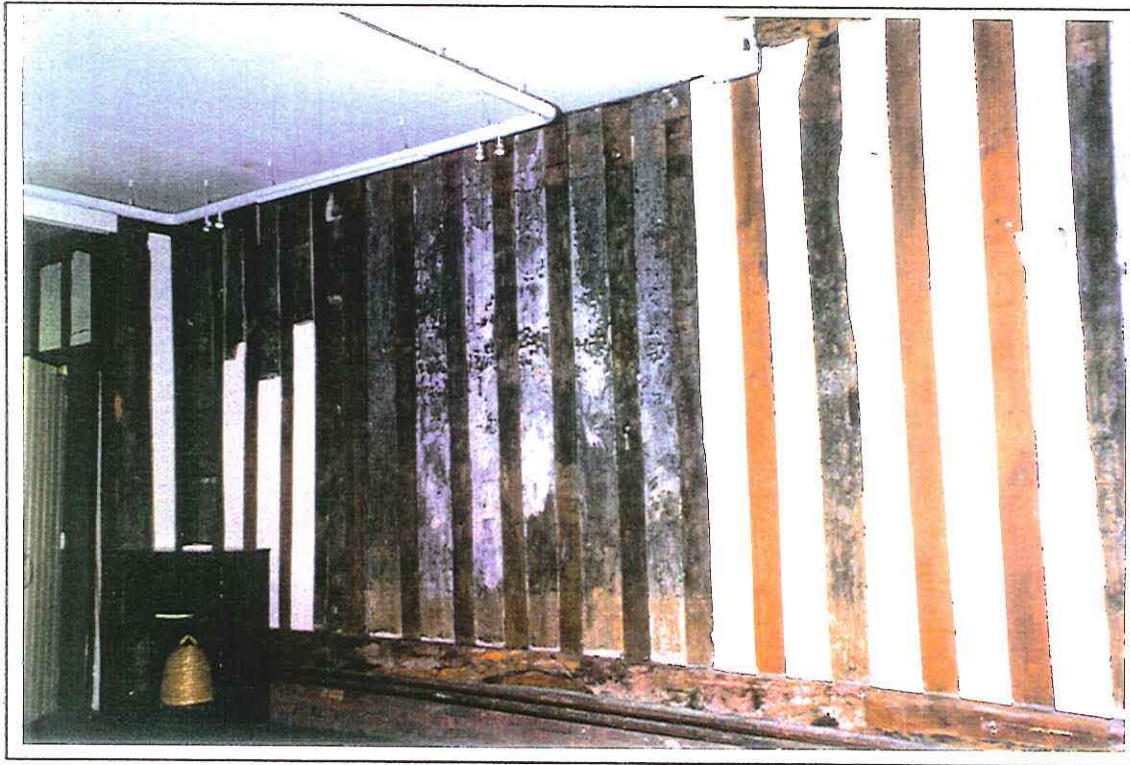
Type PROTECTIVE BARRIER **Date** 18/11/94

Person TM/JD

Comments The installation of a barrier should be considered to protect the painting from inadvertent mechanical damage.

Type UNCOVERING **Date** 18/11/94
Person TM/JD
Comments Uncovering to remove later limewash may improve the appearance of the painting.

Type UNSPECIFIED **Date** 18/11/94
Person TM/JD
Comments A preliminary and in-depth condition survey should be undertaken upon which any treatment proposals can be based.



Lower great chamber, west wall, general view.



Detail, imitation brocade tapestry painted directly on stud and plaster wall